

# California Dreaming

## The Mamas And The Papas By Joe Postove

Longing, whether it's for a lover, time, or place is a common element in pop songs. "Papa" John Phillip's wrote perhaps the quintessential song of ache "California Dreaming" for the Mamas and Papas in a cold dreary flat in the winter of 1963 in New York City. Thinking he would rather be anywhere else, he was inspired by his wife Michelle Philips, whose wistfulness for her home in California was the genesis of this song.

When Papa John put the group together in 1965 he brought in Michelle, Denny Doherty, "Mama" Cass Elliott and they recorded the first version of the song, as the back-up to Barry McGuire, of "Eve of Destruction" fame. That single failed to chart and The Mamas And Papas decided to record it on their own.

This early stereo record is sung in counterpose with the men and women repeating each other in turn in separate channels. With Denny Doherty on lead, we are taken on a trip through the gray cold New York winter, trapped in a love affair gone old; thinking *If I didn't tell her, I could leave today...I'd be safe and warm if I was in L.A.*

Getting to California, somehow, was a common goal for many in the emerging youth culture of the 1960's. Places like Haight-Ashbury, Los Angeles, and Big Sur were romanticized in song, films, and books. California Dreaming was a direct invitation to kids that their old, tired, Midwestern ethic of getting a job, getting married and being a good citizen could be put aside for the trip to L.A. where the city was filled with love, drugs, sex, and peace. It was hope for a sixteen year old looking at working at the filling station or bagging groceries until his life somehow took off.

California Dreaming is a gorgeous collection of perfect harmonization, inventive production and instrumentation, and lyrics that sang to the target group of every top forty radio station in America.

It is also the rare rock and roll song to have a flute solo. This solo is the imagined flight of the sad, weary New Yorker, who even pretends to pray in his desperation to get to California.

In two minutes and forty one seconds John Phillips has produced a hippy symphony. The culture that was to come would not have been the same without California Dreaming as part of that soundtrack.